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ABSTRACT

The reasons that counselors in resident summer camps return to work are explored, taking into account the differences between private and agency camps, and differing attitudes of male and female camp counselors. A random sample of returning counselors at 15 private and 15 agency camps in the Northeast were selected for the study. Six attitudinal dimensions were identified to discover the most important factor in influencing the counselor's decision to return to work: stimulation or inspiration, living conditions and camp life, personal, camp administration, job-related experience, and travel and location. Results showed that agency counselors of both sexes had similar feelings towards the attitudinal dimensions, ranking personal considerations the highest. Private camp counselors had differing feelings: the males rated the personal dimensions highest, and the females felt the job-related experience was most important. Studies done in the 1950s and 1960s showed that counselors came to camp because they liked the outdoors, travel and fun. Today's counselors are more concerned with gaining job-related skills to help them compete in a vary competitive job market. Camp directors should examine their policies, procedures and traditions to increase the retention of counselors. (JMM)

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WHY DO COUNSELORS RETURN TO WORK AT CAMP?

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Camping professionals have been trying for many years to determine what motivates counselors to return to work at summer camp. Ernest Schmidt, former Executive Director of the A.C.A., wrote in the March 1967 issue of Camping Magazine:

> Each of us who has hired top-notch camp counselors and had them come back year after year, realizes that we can pay them as much as they are worth. Also, we are aware that they could be earning a lot more money in other fields. Why then do they come back?

This paper deals with the question of why counselors in resident camps return to work at camp. It will explore the differences between private and agency camps and the differing attitudes of male and females camp counselors.

The late 1940s and 1950s were a golden age for both camping and environmental education. An ACA report, done in 1953 by Robert McBride, entitled Camping at the Mid-Century, recorded twelve thousand camps and four million campers, a substantial increase from the 1940 report of forty-three hundred camps. The number of studies done on camping also reflect the enthusiasm during this time. The large and rapid increase in camps, however, created a number of problems. One of these problems, counselor retention, became the subject of professional concern in the years 1955-57.

A group of four women at Wayne State University did a four-part study entitled "Studies in Camp Counselor Recruitment and Retention." They surveyed 175 counselors at eight Michigan camps during the summer of 1954. The results of their retention study showed that 51 percent of those who would take another camp job picked working with children and liking the out-of-doors as the main reasons (Mirkin, 1955).

Ott's survey of 320 counselors at twenty-six midwestern YMCA camps showed similar results. Working with youth and working outdoors were the two most important factors chosen by the subjects of his study, "A Study of the Sources of Camp Counselors and Factors that Affect Their Retention" (Ott, 1956).

In an informal retention survey of seventeen Recreation Education students at S.U.N.Y. Cortland, Metcalf found that the students, who had an average of three years camp counseling experience, considered the following to be the most important reasons they would want to return to the same camp next year: adequate time off, most often; staff-director relations, second; and good food, third. This study, done in 1957, also solicited opinions from camp directors, who thought that choosing the right type of person was most important in retaining counselors (Metcalf, 1957).

Kaufman wrote about counselors' motivations for coming to camp in the March 1963 issue of Camping Magazine:

> Why then does the young man, or young woman, spend his or her summer in a children's camp? If one were to ask the counselor for an honest reason, and a candid reply were to be given, the chances are that he would give three reasons in the following order: getting away from the city, fun, and a chance to earn money.

In a 1981 survey of 143 University of Connecticut students in attendance at "Camp Day," William Servedio collected data on the students' attitude toward summer camp employment. The sample included both students with and without previous camp experience. The results showed that the main concern of both groups was the issue of broadening responsibilities and encouraging creativity. The two highest ranking items were (a) opportunity to exercise personal skills or talents, and (b) personal

satisfaction and enjoyment derived (Servedio, 1981)

A survey of 84 counselors and staff members at Wisconsin camps in 1982 by Karla Henderson collected data on why counselors sought camp jobs. The number one reason was because they liked to work with children. The second most frequently mentioned reason was because counselors liked the outdoors and the third was the other staff members (Henderson, 1982).

In an effort to determine which part of the camp counselor's job was most important in influencing a counselor's decision to return to work at camp, six attitudinal dimensions, or groupings of camp job factors, were identified (Table 1). The six attitudinal dimensions cover the major areas of a camp counselor's job experience. The "stimulation or inspiration" attitudinal dimension included the items in A.H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs "self-actualization" level (growth, achievement, and advancement), and Frederick Herzberg's "motivation" factor (achievement, recognition, creativeness, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth). The "living conditions and camp life "attitudinal dimension included the items in Maslow's hierarchy of needs "physiological" level (working conditions and food). The "job related experience" attitudinal dimension included those items that might relate to a camp counselor's future career (working with youth, leadership, using program skills, and learning new skills). The "camp administration" attitudinal dimension included those items that describe the camp's management (staff policies, supervision, evaluations, director, ACA accreditation, and salary). The "personal" attitudinal dimension included the items in Maslow's hierarchy of needs "ego, status and esteem" level and those items of a personal nature (new status and privileges, personal satisfaction, spiritual growth, and friends). The "travel and location" attitudinal dimension included those items that concerned the camp location (travel away from home, location, and reimbursement for travel).

TABLE 1

THE ATTITUDINAL DIMENSIONS OF CAMP COUNSELOR RETENTION[a]

Stimulation or Inspiration	Camp Administration
Appreciation of work done	Staff policies
Opportunity to assume new responsibility	Supervision
Opportunity for Advancement	Evaluation
Sense of accomplishment	Camp director
Opportunity for personal growth	ACA accreditation
Opportunity to be creative	Salary
Living Conditions and Camp Life	Job Related Experience
Quality and amount of food	Opportunity to work with youth
Living arrangements	Opportunity to gain job related experience
Opportunity to work in outdoors	Opportunity to exercise leadership roles
Daily routine of camp life	Opportunity to use program skills
Time off	Opportunity to learn new skills
Personal	Travel and Location
Opportunity to gain new status and privileges	Opportunity to travel away from home
Personal satisfaction	Camp's location
Opportunity for spiritual growth	Camp's location in relation to home, i.e. ocean or mountains
Opportunity to renew old friendship and make new friends	Reimbusement for travel

[a]The attitudinal dimensions of counselor retention were developed by the investigator. The items in the attitudinal dimensions came from studies by William H. Ott, William Servedio, and Fredrick Herzberg.

In order to better understand the attitudes that influence a counselor's decision to return to work at camp, a study was undertaken by this author to analyze the differing attitutes between male and female returning camp counselors at agency and private camps using the six attitudinal dimensions of camp counselor retention. The study also gathered examples of the specific reasons counselors cite for holding certain attitudes about camps and returning to them. A random sample of returning camp counselors at 15 agency camps and 15 private camps (all accredited by the ACA) in the northeast were selected for the study. Seventeen of the camps responded by the deadline date and returned 193 usable counselor questionnaire forms.

The summary of mean scores and multivariate analysis of variance results for attitudinal dimensions (Table 2) represents information gathered from the returning camp counselors on the importance each attitudinal dimension had in influencing their decision to return to work at camp. The attitudinal dimensions were: (a) stimulation or inspiration, (b) living conditions, (c) job related experience, (d) camp administration, (e) personal, and (f) travel and location. The returning counselors responded on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from a low of 1, no importance, to a high of 5, very important. The mean scores were reported for female and male counselors at both agency and private camps. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was calculated to determine if there was any over-all attitudinal difference between male and female counselors at agency and private camps. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated for each of the six attitudinal dimensions to determine if there was significant difference on the

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORES AND MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS FOR ATTITUDINAL DIMENSIONS

	Agency		Private	
Attitudinal Dimensions	Female n=58	Male n=52	Female n=40	Male n=40
Personal	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.9
Job Related Experience	4.2	4.2	4.1	3.5
Stimulation or Inspiration	4.1	4.0	4.0	3.8
Camp Administration	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.6
Living Conditions	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.5
Travel	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.1
Over-all Significant difference for one-way MANOVA of attitudinal dimensions	.839		.118	
Significant difference for one-way ANOVA of single attitudinal dimensions	no		.007	
			Job related experience	

*P is less than .05

importance of each dimension between male and female counselors at agency and private camps. The frequency of the comments on selected items in the counselor questionnaire were calculated. Only comments made ten or more times are reported in this paper.

The results of the study indicated that the agency camp counselors, both male and female, had similar feelings toward the attitudinal dimensions of camp counselor retention. The MANOVA results, .839, indicated homogenious, similar, responses on the six attitudinal dimensions. The ANOVA results confirmed these findings by indicating no significant differences on any of the six attitudinal dimensions. The rank order of attitudinal dimension mean scores by camp type and sex (Table 3) show that both male and female agency camp counselors ranked the attitudinal dimensions in the same order: (1) personal, (2) job related experiences, (3) stimulation or inspiration, (4) camp administration, (5) living conditions, and (6) travel.

The results for male and female private camp counselors indicated that they had differing feelings toward the attitudinal dimensions. The MANOVA results, .118, indicated that there was a wide range of responses for one or more of the attitudinal dimensions. The ANOVA results confirmed these findings by indicating significant difference between male and female counselors on the job related experience attitudinal dimension. The rank order of attitudinal dimension mean scores by camp type and sex (Table 3) show that male and female private camp counselors ranked the attitudinal dimensions in a different order of importance. These results show that male and female private camp counselors had different dimensions that influenced their decision to return to work at camp.

TABLE 3

RANK ORDER OF ATTITUDINAL DIMENSION MEAN SCORES
BY CAMP TYPE AND SEX

	Agency		Private	
Rank	Female	Male	Female	Male
1.	Personal	Personal	Job Related	Personal
2.	Job Related Experience	Job Related Experience	Personal	Stimulation
3.	Stimulation	Stimulation	Stimulation	Camp Admin.
4.	Camp Admin.	Camp Admin.	Camp Admin.	Job Related Experience
5.	Living Conditions	Living Conditions	Living Conditions	Living Conditions
6.	Travel	Travel	Travel	Travel

The female private camp counselors felt that the job related experience attitudinal dimension was most important in influencing their decision to return to work at camp. The male private camp counselors felt that the personal attitudinal dimension was most important and ranked job related experience fourth.

The results of this study can tell agency and private camp directors much about why their counselors return to work at camp. Agency camp directors should be aware that both their male and female counselors, and private camp directors their male counselors, ranked the personal attitudinal dimension first and the job related experience dimension a close second. The items in the personal attitudinal dimension and examples of the specific reasons cited by counselors may be the key to providing a more meaningful work experience to many camp counselors. The first item, an opportunity to gain new status and privileges, drew counselor comments such as, "a higher job this summer" and "more responsibility." Counselors responded to personal satifaction with, "it was an enjoyable and rewarding experience, best job around," "camper-staff relationships," and "helping kids." Opportunity for spiritual growth drew the comment, "good services and sharing feelings and beliefs."

The job related experience attitudinal dimension was ranked first by female private camp counselors and second by both male and female agency camp counselors. The items and counselor comments may give the reasons why this dimension was highly ranked. Opportunity to gain job related skills drew such comments as, "future profession (teacher, special education, forestry, recreation, coach)," "working with youth," and "working with people." The counselor comment on opportunity to learn new skills was, " I learned new recreation skills (including

camping, sailing, and artistic)." The opportunity to exercise leadership roles item had the comment, "I was able to lead groups and exercise leadership. "The counselor comment on opportunity to use program skills was, "There was a good variety of programs to work on where you could do program building and use creative ideas."

The stimulation or inspiration attitudinal dimension was ranked second by private male counselors and third by the other counselor groups. Some of the counselor comments should be noted by camp directors. For appreciation of work done, "Director said "good job", or "thanks". Opportunity for advancement drew the comment, " I was free to grow and move up." The most frequent response to the sense of accomplishment item was, "teaching campers gives me a good feeling." The opportunity to assume responsibility comments were, "being in charge and responsible for kids" and "freedom to develop programs."

The results of this study (Table 3) point out the attitudinal changes in the counselor population. The studies that were done during the 1950's and 60's showed that counselors came to camp because they liked the outdoors, travel and fun. Today's counselors are more concerned with gaining job related skills to help them compete in a very competitive job market. Camp directors can help their staff gain these important skills through good staff training programs and by providing the opportunities to exercise these skills.

In summary, camp directors should be aware that the results of this study indicate which attitudinal dimensions of camp counselor retention were most important in influencing their counselors' decision to return to work at camp. The counselors' comments on the various items provide

examples of what is important to them during their camp work experience. Camp directors should examine their policies, procedures and traditions to insure that their counselors summer work will provide a meaningful experience that the counselor will want to repeat the next summer. If a camp can increase the retention rate of it's staff, the director can devote more time to recruiting campers and less to finding counselors.

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